

# LINCOLN AS A NEIGHBOR

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IT happened that my grandfather, Solomon B. Wheelock, lived in Springfield, Ill., on Eighth street, opposite the home of Abraham Lincoln. The children in the two families were playmates, and I have asked my mother, Mrs. E. J. Ayres, of Los Angeles, who was a girl of eighteen prior to Mr. Lincoln's election as President, to write out her recollections of the family.

It was during the Lincoln-Douglas debates, and especially after the Cooper Union speech, that the neighbors began to realize that they had in their circle not only a distinguished man whom they respected and loved, but also a great man. Mr. Lincoln had served several terms in the State legislature, had helped bring the State Capitol to Springfield, and had served one term in the House of Representatives at Washington. He earned his living in the practise of the law, and was regarded as a well-to-do citizen. He was at this time in his fiftieth year, but seemed younger.

My mother recalls the frequent picture of Mr. Lincoln going down the street, wearing his customary tall hat and gray shawl, leading by the hands both Willie and Tad, who were usually dancing and pulling him along. Always his thoughtful face was bent forward, as if thinking out some deep problem, yet he was responsive to the questions of the children. He often brought Tad home on his shoulders.

One evening Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln were to attend a reception at the home of Mr. Dubois, the State Auditor, a couple of blocks down on Eighth street. My mother was helping Mrs. Lincoln dress for the party. Willie and Tad came home from a candy-pull. They were smeared with molasses candy from head to foot. When they heard of the party they wanted to go, too. Robert, who at that time was planning to enter Harvard, was to stay at home with the little boys. Mrs. Lincoln said firmly that they could not go, whereupon the two boys set up a cry. Their mother was steadfast, and the boys were determined. They were kick-

ing and screaming when Mr. Lincoln entered.

"This will never do," he said. "Mary, if you will let the boys go, I will take care of them."

"Why, Father, you know that is no place for boys to be. When people give a party like that it is no place for children." By this time the boys began to listen.

"But," said Mr. Lincoln, "I will take them around the back way, and they can stay in the kitchen." He then talked to the boys about being good and making no promises that were not to be kept, and it was arranged that the boys should go if Robert and my mother should get them dressed. They were cleaned up, and in the haste Tad found his short trousers on hind-side before. At this he set up another storm, because he "couldn't walk good," which his father quieted by a wave of his hand and saying, "Remember, now, remember." When the little boys were ready, they went ahead with their father, not to the kitchen but to the full reception. With Robert Mrs. Lincoln followed, in a beautiful canary-colored satin dress, low neck and short sleeves, and large hoop-skirts, after the manner of the time.

At one time when Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln went together to one of the Lincoln-Douglas debates, Tad was left at the Wheelock home for a week. He was a restless child and very determined. He and Willie were both greatly interested in their father's election. "Vote for Old Abe" was their slogan, adopted from the campaign. Willie, who was a lovable child and his father's favorite, used to stand on the terrace of their house and urge passersby to "Vote for Old Abe." He was a pretty good speech-maker himself, and his boy companions, at the end of their parades, would call for "a speech from Willie" to which he would proudly respond.

Mr. Lincoln always took a thoroughly kind and human interest in all his neighbors. My grandfather was for several years an invalid. On returning from a trip Mr. Lin-

coln did not fail to "drop in for a chat with Mr. Wheelock." Sitting on the edge of the high porch, with his feet resting on the ground, he would talk over the political news of the day. The Lincolns kept one horse with a two-seated carriage, and were far from exclusive in its use. An old friend of the family, Dr. Wm. Jaynes, relates that one Mrs. Dallman told him how kind to her were both Mr. and Mrs. Lincoln when she was very ill. Mr. Lincoln rocked the cradle of her little child, and Mrs. Lincoln tenderly nursed the child at her own breast.

It was the invariable habit of Mr. Lincoln to be most considerate of Mrs. Lincoln. In the new and growing city it was sometimes difficult to get and keep a maid. At such times Mr. Lincoln would help freely in the kitchen. On coming from his office he would take off his coat, put on a large blue apron, and do whatever was needed. At such times the family used sometimes to eat in the kitchen. Happening in, my mother was once invited to share a kitchen luncheon, and vividly remembers Mr. Lincoln's large figure against the kitchen wall. To him the matter of food was always one of comparative indifference. When called to meals he came when he was ready, and seemed never just ready to come. Mr. Lincoln was not a garden man, and my mother does not recall ever seeing a hoe or a tool in his hand, except once when he was sawing wood in the back yard.

In the numerous political gatherings at Mr. Lincoln's house, Mrs. Lincoln was a very great help to her husband. A lady of refined tastes, with large social experience, and with considerable political insight, she carried the social end of the campaign admirably. She used frequently to ask my mother to assist in passing the refreshments, a service gladly rendered. On Mr. Lincoln's return at the end of the Douglas debate, a few friends, including Mr. Hatch, Secretary of State, and Mr. Dubois, gathered to get the latest word. Mr. Lincoln was convinced that he would not be elected. With his chair leaning back against the wall, his long legs reaching the floor in front, an ungainly figure, his pale face showing the fatigue of travel, he ran his hand up through his long hair and said, "Boys, you can put in your best licks, but I am not going to be elected." There was a general protest. Mr. Lincoln repeated emphatically, "Boys, I am *not* going to be elected." No one agreed, but as

everybody knows he was defeated for the office of United States Senator.

At the time of the Presidential election great excitement prevailed in the town, with flag-raising and processions. This campaign appears to have marked the beginning of torch-light processions, and all the men turned out in the evenings, wearing oil-skin coats and carrying torches to march for Mr. Lincoln. When the news finally came assuring the election, Mr. Lincoln remarked, "There is a little woman up the street that will be much interested in this," and walked home to tell his wife.

It was reported that when Mr. Seward and the other political friends came down from Chicago to celebrate the election they brought their own wives with them. They proposed a toast to Mr. Lincoln with wine, but he said, "No, boys, water has been good enough so far," and he drank to their health in cold water.

After Mr. Lincoln's election as President and before he left Springfield, my mother called at his office to introduce my father. Several gentlemen were present. Mr. Lincoln was very gracious. Taking her hand in his large hand, which was always very reassuring, he said, "This is my little friend Delie, Delie Wheelock" [her name is Ardelia], and gave a few moments of undivided attention. It was this unfailing quality of genial friendliness to all whom he knew that endeared him to them, and left his indelible impression.

The next neighbor on Mr. Wheelock's side of the street was Dr. N. W. Miner, the Baptist minister, who later helped to secure for Mrs. Lincoln the needed pension from Congress. A sister of Mrs. Miner, Mrs. Shearer, was the most intimate friend of Mrs. Lincoln, although the Lincolns attended the Presbyterian church. Mrs. Shearer spent six weeks with the Lincolns in the early days at the White House, and relates that Mrs. Lincoln, who was anxious about Mr. Lincoln's health, used to get him to ride out with them nearly every afternoon at four o'clock. Mrs. Lincoln recognized the keen political training of Mr. Lincoln's associates, and used often to remark to him, "These men should realize, Mr. Lincoln, that you are the President," or "Don't forget that you are President," to which Mr. Lincoln would smile and say, "Never fear, Mary, there is no doubt who is President." It is very interesting, therefore, that when Mr. Seward presented his





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MRS. LINCOLN WITH HER TWO YOUNGER SONS, WILLIE AND TAD  
(From a hitherto unpublished photograph by Brady, in 1861)

famous memorandum of things necessary to do with foreign governments, expecting possibly that in the pressure of responsibility he would be directed to proceed with them, Mr. Lincoln replied, "If all these important things must be done, I am the one to do them."

Not even this brief sketch of Mr. Lincoln as a neighbor would be satisfactory without those few memorable words pronounced to his friends and neighbors on the occasion of his final departure from Springfield for Washington in February, 1861. Before the train started Mr. Lincoln appeared on the rear platform. It was raining very hard. He took off his hat. Every man's hat came off. Mr. Lincoln said:

My friends, no one not in my situation can appreciate my feeling of sadness at this parting. To this place, and the kindness of this people I owe everything. Here I have lived a quarter of a century and have passed from a young man to an old man. Here my children have been born, and one of them is buried. I now leave, not knowing when or whether ever I may return, with a task before me greater than that which rested upon Washington. Without the assistance of that Divine Being who ever attended him I cannot succeed. With that assistance I cannot fail. Trusting in Him who can go with me and remain with you, and be everywhere for good, let us confidently hope that all will yet be well. To His care commending you, as I hope your prayers will commend me, I bid you an affectionate farewell.

One account says that Mr. Lincoln was touched with emotion and shed tears.

